

FAA Facts

Federal Aviation Administration
2005

Great Lakes Public Affairs: (847) 294-7427

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS AND THE FAA

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is both a document and a public process. It provides a means to discuss significant environmental impacts that could occur as a result of a proposed airport project. It also reviews reasonable alternatives that could avoid or minimize adverse impacts.

Public participation and consultation with other agencies, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is a cornerstone of the process. An EIS is developed and used by a Federal agency such as the FAA to decide whether to (a) proceed with an airport project as planned, (b) change the proposal to avoid adverse impacts, (c) or to take no action at all.

Steps of an EIS:

- *Publish notice of intent.* Notice of intent to prepare an EIS and conduct scoping is published in the Federal Register.
- *Conduct scoping.* Scoping is the process used to explain a proposed project to "stakeholders" and solicit their ideas on environmental issues to be addressed by the EIS document. The process includes meetings for community representatives, elected officials, and other agencies, and a workshop and face-to-face comment meeting for the general public. Written comments from the public also are accepted for a designated time period before and after the scoping meetings and workshop.
- *Identify issues.* Environmental issues could include any or all of the following topics: noise impact, air quality, community disruption, business or home relocations, cultural or historic impacts, impacts on flora and fauna, impact on wetlands, floodplains and rivers, farmland impact, impact on energy supply and natural resources, solid waste impacts, and impacts attributable to light emissions.
- *Prepare draft EIS.* The federal agency conducting the analysis (the FAA, in this example) prepares a draft EIS that takes into consideration public comments received during the scoping process. This document discusses the purpose and need of the project, discusses alternatives, analyzes environmental consequences of the original proposal and any alternatives under active consideration, and discloses measures that might mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

- Conduct public hearing. After the community has at least 30 days to review the draft EIS, a public hearing is scheduled by the FAA to summarize information contained in the draft, and FAA representatives are available at the hearing to respond to questions. The hearing also includes an opportunity for individuals to provide oral or written testimony to a hearing officer and/or court transcriber. The public comment opportunity usually remains open for additional written comments for a designated time period after the public hearing.
- Prepare final EIS. The FAA then prepares a final EIS that takes into account comments received in the public hearing process and additional environmental analysis. This document reflects the final evaluation of environmental impacts associated with all the alternatives and identifies a preferred alternative along with possible environmental mitigation requirements.
- File the EIS. The final EIS is transmitted to resource agencies and a notice of its public availability is published in the Federal Register. The document, together with public comments and responses, also is filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which in turn publishes notice of the filing in the Federal Register.
- Issue Record of Decision. Ultimately, the FAA issues its Record of Decision not earlier than 30 days from the time the EPA notice of filing is published in the Federal Register. This document discusses considerations that entered into its decision about the proposed airport project. Construction by the airport sponsor can proceed upon publication of the FAA's Record of Decision.

At any point in the process, the FAA can determine that no significant adverse environmental impact is associated with a proposed project. In that case, the agency can decide to convert the EIS to an Environmental Assessment, issue a Finding of No Significant Impact, and allow the airport sponsor to proceed with their proposed project.

More information about the Federal Aviation Administration's responsibility for environmental evaluations can be found in FAA Order 5050.4A, Airport Environmental Handbook, available on the Internet at www.faa.gov/arp/app600/5054a/5054a1.htm, and in FAA Order 1050.1D, Policies and Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts, www.aee.faa.gov/e3/1050pt1d/.